SECURING PROTECTIONS AGAINST CARBON EMISSIONS (SPACE) TAX ACT

For months, the American public has witnessed billionaires and celebrities with enough money to vaccinate entire countries, end homelessness, cure diseases, or feed a nation launch themselves into space gain notoriety and create a new space tourism industry. These launches are yet another example of the disturbing trend in rising wealth inequality in the United States.

As this nascent industry takes shape, Americans cannot overlook the environmental impact of sending humans into space, particularly when there is no scientific value associated with the launch. While proponents of suborbital space flights point to transatlantic flights as having similar carbon footprints, these flights carry significantly more passengers and travel much farther. The result is space launches accounting for an estimated 60-times greater emissions than transatlantic flights on a per-passenger basis. That is enough to drive a car around the earth and more than twice the carbon budget recommended in the Paris climate accord. According to the World Resources Institute an 11-minute flight emits at least 75 tons of carbon per passenger, the approximate amount of carbon that an individual from the bottom billion of the wealth distribution will emit in their entire lifetime.

Potentially further compounding the problem, researchers are actively exploring the impact of space launches on accelerating the depletion of stratospheric ozone, which appears to deplete faster from rocket engines using substances common in orbital space launches.

THE SPACE TAX ACT

The SPACE Tax Act establishes a new excise tax regime on commercial space flights that is structured like the excise taxes we all pay for commercial aviation.

The SPACE Tax Act would establish a 10 percent per-passenger tax on the price of a commercial flight to space. Crew and government astronauts would not need to pay the tax. The legislation also includes a two-tiered excise tax for each commercial launch carrying humans into space. Each launch into orbit (exceeding 80 miles above the Earth's surface) would be liable for a $2 million launch tax and each suborbital space launch (between 50 and 80 miles above the Earth's surface) would be liable for a $100,000 launch tax, both adjusted to inflation. Flights that are entirely filled with crew or government astronauts would not need to pay the tax.

Supporters: Americans for Tax Fairness, Coalition on Human Needs, Communications Workers of America, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice.